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GAY
GODS
AND
MERRY
MORTALS

ROBERT
J. SHORES



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GAY GODS
and
MERRY MORTALS

GAY GODS AND MERRY MORTALS

SOME EXCURSIONS IN VERSE
BY ROBERT J. SHORES



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20

TITLES AND PAGES

Proem	7
Actæon	8
Adonis	10
Proserpina	13
Anaxarete	16
Penelope	18
Sappho	20
Syrinx	22
Tithonus	24
Ariadne	27
Io	29
Dido	32
Daphne	37

Gay Gods and Merry Mortals

PROEM.

S*OME ancient tales of Pagan days
The author of this book relates
Explaining how in divers ways
The gods displayed their human
traits;
And how they oft in other years
Set human beings by the ears.*

*Belike these rhymes recall to you
The jingles of the poet Saxe;
The poet here is Saxon, too,
And so must needs relate his facts
In such a way that they are clear
And suited to the Saxon ear.*

*Some anecdotes which Homer told
You'll miss in this; but reader, pray
Consider, what was good of old
Would never pass the mails to-day.
And hence this history belated
Has been—well, slightly expurgated.*

GAY GODS, AND

ACTÆON.

*"He saw her charming, but he saw not half
The charms her downcast modesty concealed."*

—Thomson.

A CTÆON, with the winding horn,
Pursued the Chase in ardent
youth
And what he wore when he was
born;
(And little else, to tell the truth,
For in those days of which I speak
They just changed sandals once a
week!)

And as he wandered from the path,
Chanced on Diana in her bath.

All trembling, like a startled fawn,
Upstart then the Goddess chaste,
Sprang from the pool the bank upon
And donned her crescent in great haste,
(For, to her credit be it said,
She *did* wear something on her head,)
Then, the conventions satisfied
Gazed on Actæon, haughty-eyed.

MERRY MORTALS

Actæon tumbled in a trice
That he had got himself in Dutch,
But thought if quite polite and nice
She would not mind the thing so much.
So the poor fool in this fond hope
Said, "Tell me, did you use Pear's
Soap?"
Diana, vexed to hear the gag,
Forthwith made Actæon a stag.

The Moral is, if you should chance
Upon a lady in the nude,
Remember this sad circumstance,
For she'll get even if you're rude;
And conversation, if uncouth,
May cost you dear in naked truth!

GAY GODS, AND

ADONIS.

DAN CUPID with a broken shaft
Had bent his grand-dad, Jove, quite
double,
And then, to cap the climax, laughed;
And so he found himself in trouble;
Up on that august lap was yanked
And thoroughly and soundly spanked,
Till Cupid saddened, sobered, sore,
Wished that his wings had sprouted
lower.

Dan Cupid then in rage and grief
Straightway set out to find his mother,
Who stitched upon her evening leaf,
(She swore she didn't have another,
Or, if she had, she still would swear
She had none that was fit to wear.)
And so the naughty youngster found
her
With leaves and sewing girls around
her.

When Venus heard her infant's wail,
In apprehension she besought him

MERRY MORTALS

To tell her all his angry tale;
Then to her breast she, breathless, caught
him.

And, as his tear-stained face she kissed,
Upon an arrow scratched her wrist.
So in her veins in this strange fashion
Was introduced the germ of passion.

Indignant at the godlet's tale,
She hastened to protest to Zeus,
Her lovely cheek with anger pale,
She was prepared to raise the deuce.
But as Olympus' mount drew near,
She spied Adonis chasing deer.
And in a moment from her head
All thoughts of wrath and Cupid fled.

Straightway she hitched her gentle team
Of doves, and left her carriage standing,
For this fair youth to her doth seem
A hero, comely and commanding—
Although in fact and eke in truth
He was a simple country youth;
And so it happened that the Queen
Of Beauty found him shy and green

Now, Venus, veteran at the game
Of flirting, would not be denied;
'As goddesses can feel no shame,

GAY GODS, AND

She soon was anchored to his side;
Do what he would, he could not shake
her,
Go where he would, he had to take her;
Until one morn upon the plain
She found the fair Adonis slain.

This story should a warning be
To maidens bold who wish to woo,
For if you seek your lover, he
Most certainly will not seek you;
All men may love, but just the same
They would be hunters—not the game.
Adonis, so the story saith,
Was really simply boared to death!

MERRY MORTALS

PROSERPINA.

*"Forth reaching to the fruit, she pluk'd, she
eat;
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her
seat
Sighing through all her works gave signs of
woe
That all was lost."*

—Milton.

ON Aetna's isle Dis Pluto drove
His devil-wagon one fine day,
And passing through fair Enna's grove
Beheld Proserpina at play;
He asked, "Will you not take a ride?"
"You're very kind," the maid replied,
And stepped into his turn-out swell;
And that was how she went to hell.

For Pluto, whipping up his team,
Sped on toward Tartarus in mirth,
And when opposed by Cyane's stream,
He took a short-cut through the earth.
Nor paused, nor drew his rein before
He heard Cerberus' welcome roar,

GAY GODS, AND

And sniffed the smell of singeing soul
By which he knew he'd reached his goal.

Ceres, Proserpina's mamma,
Was almost crazed with grief and fear;
(As to Proserpina's papa,
His name I never chanced to hear),
She cursed for all that she was worth
The crops and fruits of Mother Earth;
"You'll bear no fruit," she told the
Ground,
"Until my Prossie has been found!"

Jove, who beheld the farmer's need,
And saw the season's crops all fail,
Said, "This is Cereous, indeed,
That fellow Dis should be in jail!"
"I think," said Juno, "'twere as well—
It does no good to give him hell;"
And so it might have been decreed
But for one small pomegranate seed.

In Hades Ceres' daughter sweet
Was offered luscious bread and jam,
But she was much too cross to eat
And even scorned the deviled ham;
Until at last she made a slip
And swallowed a pomegranate pip;

MERRY MORTALS

Now, they who eat in hell—alack!
To earth may never more come back.

The Moral is—don't take a chance
Joy-riding with a strange chauffeur,
Remember this sad circumstance
Or you will get in trouble sure.
If you *must* go—don't go alone,
The devil hates a chaperone.
So mind the pips and look alive—
Dis Pluto often goes to drive!

GAY GODS, AND

ANAXARETE.

IN Cyprus dwelt Anaxarete,
A maiden famous for her beauty,
With disposition far from sweet,
Who looked on flirting as a duty.
'Tis said she scarcely would despise
At slaves and such to roll her eyes,
'Till most the men of Cyprus were
In love, or half in love with her.

Young Iphis was a worthy lad
And born of parents poor but proud;
He was a credit to his dad,
Until one day while in a crowd
He chanced a college chum to meet
Out walking with Anaxarete;
And when she rolled her lovely eyes
Poor Iphis gasped in glad surprise.

One glance, and Iphis was her slave,
All other interests he forgot;
Forgot to eat, forgot to shave,
And wrote in rhyme a deal of rot
To prove his heart was at the feet
Of stony-cold Anaxarete;

MERRY MORTALS

Who met his protests and his tears
With cutting jests and crushing sneers.

For Ana, as do all coquettes,
So soon grew weary of his wooing,
And Iphis took to cigarettes,
But still she answered "Nothing doing!"
And added—insult ne'er forgotten!
She thought his poetry was rotten;
And finally to fix his place
She slammed the door in Iphis' face.

When Iphis saw that all was past,
And knew that he could call no more,
He took a rope and made it fast
And hanged himself before her door.
And, when his funeral passed her place,
She thought to mock his pallid face;
But Venus, leaning from her throne,
Had seen, and turned the maid to stone.

At Salamis, her statue still
Points to the Moral of this tale—
That any maid who flirts to kill
Is really quite beyond the pale.
And as for lovers; let me say
If she is bored, just go away;
No gentleman, and this I know,
Will hang about when he's *de trop*!

GAY GODS, AND

PENELOPE.

*"Good-nature and good-sense must ever join;
To err is human, to forgive, divine."*

—Pope.

PENELOPE, a Spartan maid,
The brave Ulysses wooed and wed,
She in a modest blush arrayed,
He with a crown upon his head.
Two hearts that beat as one—no tear
Bedimmed their bliss for one whole
year;
At Ithaca they dwelt in peace—
Not Ithaca, New York—but Greece.

Alas! Scarce had been born their boy,
An infant very fair and bright,
When came a horrid war in Troy
And papa had to go and fight.
He left Penelope in tears—
He went and stayed for years and
years;
And while away, I am afraid,
He sometimes wooed another maid.

MERRY MORTALS

In many lands he dwelt as guest
Of ladies of exceeding beauty;
Ulysses, it must be confessed,
In flirting quite forgot his duty.
He flirted here, he flirted there,
In fact he flirted everywhere—
With Calypso, Nausicaa, Circe—
And he a man of family—Mercy!

Penelope, dissolved in tears,
Bewailed her spouse—the faithless Turk!
And stood off suitors twenty years
By doing endless fancy work.
By day she made her stitches right,
But pulled them out again by night,
Until her husband, tired of larks,
Came home and slew that bunch of
sparks.

The husband, even though he err
And lead abroad a lively life,
Dislikes, when he comes back to her,
To find that others woo his wife.
Ulysses lacked in morals—true,
But she had quite enough for two—
May Eros grant a wife to me
As patient as Penelope!

GAY GODS, AND

SAPPHO.

SAPPHO was pretty all agree,
Some say that she was stately,
You cannot prove it, though, by me—
I haven't seen her lately.
In fact, I do not now recall
I ever saw the girl at all.
So we must take Dame Rumor's word
That Sappho was, indeed, a bird.

Now, Sappho in her younger years,
Was wooed by men a-plenty,
And setting suitors by the ears
Amused her much at twenty.
She swore she'd not, at twenty-five,
Accept the nicest man alive,
And laughed to scorn the ardent Greek
Who sought to kiss her damask cheek.

But Sappho finds as years roll on,
As oft a maid discovers,
That when a maiden's youth is gone,
Gone also are her lovers.
No suitor hangs about her door
To wait her coming as of yore;

MERRY MORTALS

And what is worse than all above—
Just at this stage she falls in love.

Just what she does, if tales are truth,
(Fie on that rascal Cupid!)

Is to select a verdant youth,

A handsome boy, but stupid!

She tries her best to win his heart

With all her once unfailing art,

But finds—ah, Eros! think of that!

That Phaon thinks her old and fat.

Poor Sappho keenly feels the shame

Of love quite unrequited,

And though she knows herself to blame,

She feels her life is blighted.

And so when some one tells her if

She will jump off a handy cliff

'Twill cure her of her love and dumps—

She rushes out—ah! ah—she jumps!

Ah, reader, let us pause right here

To drop a tiny, briny tear;

Alas! Alack! Oh, woeful sight—

It cured her of her love, all right!

Fair maidens, heed this circumstance—

Don't jump off cliffs—jump at your
chance!

GAY GODS, AND

SYRINX.

*"Poor nymph—poor Pan—how he did weep
to find
Naught but a lovely sighing of the wind
Along the reedy stream; a half-heard strain,
Full of sweet desolation, balmy pain."*
—Keats.

IN Greece there dwelt in days gone by
A maiden huntress, passing fair,
Who lived beneath the open sky
And dearly loved the open air.
Although it really seems a shame
To call a lady such a name,
This lovely nymph was called, methinks,
S-y-r-i-n-x, Syrinx.

Syrinx, while following the Chase,
Was seen one day by ardent Pan,
A god of most repulsive face,
A sort of burlesque on a man.
If we can trust what ancients wrote,
Poor Pan was really half a goat—
Not like the Peter Pan to-day
The Misses Chase and Adams play.

MERRY MORTALS

When Pan began swift to pursue,
The maiden in her terror fled,
(I cannot blame her much, can you?)
And ran 'till she was almost dead;
But friendly spirits in a stream
Had heard and understood her scream,
And they had changed her in a wink
To reeds upon the river's brink.

The god, though thwarted in his scheme
To win the nymph, was not dismayed.
He plucked the reeds beside the stream
And from them a "Syrinx" he made.
The shepherd's pipes—so came to man
The music of the Pipes o' Pan.

The Moral? There is none; you see
Pan was, as poets all agree,
A most *immoral* deity!

GAY GODS, AND

TITHONUS.

TITHONUS, royal prince of Troy,
All mortal maidens' beauty scorning,
Chose for his love, presumptuous boy!
Aurora, goddess of the morning.
To her he wrote his royal rhymes,
For her he saved his royal dimes;
So well, indeed, he played his part,
He won at last the goddess' heart.

Aurora, wise as gods must be,
Was well aware that all men perish,
And knowing this she bent the knee,
(What won't we do for those we
cherish!)
And thus she prayed to Jove on high:
"Oh, *please* don't let Tithonus die!"
And this, the whole of her endeavor—
That Tithy, dear, might live forever.

Now, Jove, although a deity,
Was very fond of mortal ladies,
And more than once, he, even he,
Had grieved to see them go to Hades.
"I quite agree with you," he said,

MERRY MORTALS

"Tithonus would be dull if dead.
So be content, I, even I,
Decree Tithonus shall not die!"

Aurora, full of love and joy,
Laughed out in Pluto's face of gloom,
And hastened off to tell her boy
That she had saved him from the tomb.
But, ah, how foolish to forget
One other evil to be met!
'Tis sad to say, but must be told,
She quite forgot he might grow old.

Grow old he did, as most men do,
Grew gray and bald and round of tummy;
Grew deaf, grew cross and crabbed, too;
Grew bent and wrinkled like a mummy.
"Oh, Gee! Oh, Fudge! My Sakes!
Good Lands!
What's this I've got upon my hands?"
Aurora cried, nor gave a hang
Who heard her use such vulgar slang.

"Alas!" she cried, "is it decreed—
And it is even right and proper?
That I forever more should feed
A foolish, mulish old grasshopper?"
Tithonus hopped—for, you must know
That what a goddess says is *so*!

GAY GODS, AND

Tithonus, stricken but resigned,
Hopped out of sight and out of mind.

The Moral is—that age and youth
Have aye been illy yoked together,
For love cannot survive, in truth,
A prolonged spell of wintry weather.
So, when you hear your lady sigh:
“Alas! My Love will *never* die!”
Just heed Aurora’s hint, I say,
And hope no more—but hop away!

MERRY MORTALS

ARIADNE.

*"Fool, not to know that love endures no tie,
And Jove but laughs at lover's perjury."*

—Dryden.

THE Minotaur, a horrid beast
Which made its food of maidens fair
And handsome youths, to say the least
Had given Athens quite a scare.
Since Athens sent each year to Crete
A batch of folks for him to eat;
'Till on King Minos Athens soured,
For no one likes to be devoured.

Just as the folks of Athens had
Prepared to risk their all in war,
Young Theseus, to the King, his dad,
Proffered his services and swore
That he would go to Crete and slay
The Minotaur without delay;
And so with helmet-box and grip
He started on the fateful trip.

Now, Minos had a daughter fair,
Who was humane as well as Cretan,
And all in all, she did not care
To see the handsome stranger eaten.

GAY GODS, AND

So she resolved that she would aid
Young Theseus in his escapade,
Although she knew her royal dad
Would certainly be hopping mad.

The Minotaur, King Minos kept
Within a sort of mystic maze,
And in those corridors, unswept,
A man might wander, lost, for days.
And Ariadne's scheme, in fine,
Was just to take a ball of twine
And let the youth unroll the thing
And so be guided by the string.

All went as planned—oh, lucky star!
The sword of Theseus soon was wet,
And slaughtered was the Minotaur;
The king had lost his gruesome pet.
The lovers fled the monarch's wrath
But even on the homeward path
The hero, bored to hear her weep,
On Noxas left her fast asleep.

The Moral is—you should not string
Young men, unless you know them well;
For love is an uncertain thing
And strange young men, however swell,
If loosely tied and quickly bored,
Will quit you of their own accord.

MERRY MORTALS

Io.

IO and Jove were holding hands
One day beside a sylvan stream
And drawing hearts upon the sands—
Epitome of Love's young dream!
Fair Io murmured, "On my life,
Why took you Juno for your wife?
The ox-eyed Juno! In good sooth
Peroxide would be nearer truth!"

"Tut-tut!" said Jove, "you should not speak
So slightly of my good spouse;
She has been busy all this week
Up on Olympus cleaning house.
And while she sweeps, I've naught to do
But stay here making love to you!"
"She would do well," the maid replies,
"To sweep the dust from out her eyes."

Alas for Io! Juno heard
Her idle words within the hour;
Some gossip of a bee or bird
Repeated them from flower to flower,
Until 'twas whispered by the leaves

GAY GODS, AND

At Juno's threshold—"Jove deceives!"
"Deceived again?" she cried in rage;
To see what happened, turn the page.

Or, if the printer can find room
To print another line on this,
I'll state that Juno heard a boom
Of thunder—which is when gods kiss.
And hurried angrily to where
She thought to find the erring pair;
But reaching there she saw, I vow,
No maiden, but a heifer cow!

For Jove, grown wise in other years
In which he got his just deserts,
Was ever pricking up his ears
To hear the swish of Juno's skirts.
So, when he heard her on his trail,
He made his hat a milking pail
And changed poor Io, trembling now,
Into the semblance of a cow.

But Juno was not quite a fool
And saw at once her husband's trick,
'And, though appearing calm and cool,
Resolved to make that heifer sick.
"A lovely cow!" cried she. "Divine!
I cannot rest 'till it is mine!"

MERRY MORTALS

Jove cleared his throat and smoothed
his vest
But had to grant his wife's request.

Alas for Io! Juno sent
A gad-fly which beset her sore,
And drove her—which was the intent—
From sea to sea and shore to shore.
To Egypt and the Barbadoes,
Perhaps to Iowa—who knows?
The gad-fly followed where she went
And stung her to his heart's content.

And so it happens, even now,
Although she vainly tries to grab it,
The gad-fly stings the gentle cow—
He keeps it up from force of habit.

GAY GODS, AND

DIDO.

*"Up, then, Melpomene! the mournfulest
Muse of Nine,
Such cause of mourning never hadst afore;
Up, grislie ghostes! and up, my rufull
rhyme!"*

—Spenser.

“ON such a night,” as Shakespeare
once remarked,
On such a night as lovers love to
spoon,
Aeneas in his cockleshell embarked
And left poor Dido weeping 'neath the
moon;
A palm-leaf in her hand, as Shake-
speare said,
The crown of ancient Carthage on her
head;
'Twas thus Aeneas jilted the fair dame
'And put the chivalry of Greece to
shame.

Fair Dido, to go back a little way,
Had fled the vengeance of her brother's
ire,

MERRY MORTALS

Who slew her wealthy husband one fine day
And chased his widowed sister out of
Tyre;
Pygmalion was the name he bore at
court,
Though Dido always called him "Pyg"
for short;
Methinks the greedy nature of the
youth
Made Dido's nickname fit him well in
truth.

Arriving, then, on Afric's sunny shore
With some few friends who followed in
her train,
She built herself some houses and a store,
Laid out a street and called it Lover's
Lane.
And since the town was hers, none
could gainsay
Her right to royal rule and social sway;
And so it is quite easy to be seen
How, when Aeneas came, he found her
queen.

Aeneas and some refugees from Troy
Were wandering about uncharted seas;
Aeneas had a cold—unlucky boy!

GAY GODS, AND

(’Twould wring your heart to hear his
mournful sneeze!)

In fact, they all were troubled as to
nose,

Clad as they were in lightest marching
clothes;

So when they came at last to Dido’s
land,

[They were a sick and sorry-looking
band.

“Not unacquainted with distress,” she said,

“I’ve learned to succor all the down and
out;”

Straightway she had them all tucked into
bed,

And caused her heralds in the street to
shout:

“Queen Dido seeks a sovereign cure for
chills,

Bring mustard plasters, poultices and
pills;

The victor she’ll reward and make his
name

A synonym for fortune and for fame.”

As always, when incentive is supplied,

Some pharmacist got busy on the spot,
Made little pills with quinine stuffed inside;

MERRY MORTALS

She made him rich, but famous he is not.
We take them now, but who is there can
tell

The doctor who first served mankind
so well?

But let us haste—this yarn, beyond all
doubt,

Grows dull apace, and slow, and long-
drawn-out.

To cut it short; she loved him; he loved her;
He stuck around; she made him quite at
home;

The two were quite domestic I infer
Until Aeneas took a boat for Rome.

Rome wasn't there—but what cared he
for that?

'Most any town will do to dodge a flat;
Aeneas felt that he could love that spot,
Where'er it be—so be Dido was not.

Dido, deserted, built a funeral pyre,
On which she mounted with a wicked
knife;

She bade a servant set the thing afire,
And with the dagger put an end to life.
So perished Dido; died, oh died for
love!

So Dido died, as I have said above,

GAY GODS, AND

Sweet Dido, loveliest lady of the land,
On such a night—a palm-leaf in her
hand!

The Moral? This is not a moral tale.

What do we learn from it? Well, I should
say

We learn that merry widows sometimes fail,
And cutting didoes doesn't always pay.

MERRY MORTALS

DAPHNE.

FAIR Daphne was a modest miss,
A convert of the "Kiss Not" fad,
Who swore no man should know her
kiss,
Unless it be her dear old dad.
E'en as a tot it caused her grief
To play at "Drop the handkerchief";
She called each youthful suitor,
"Brute!"
Who offered her a chaste salute.

In vain her father bade her wed,
In vain he urged, in vain entreated;
She only shook her pretty head,
And all his arguments defeated.
"Talk not of men," she said. "To me,
Diana's priestess I would be,
And range the woods, heart-free, foot-
loose,
To kill the chipmunk and the moose."

"Ah, well!" he sighed (It is a shame,
And rather mars this graceful verse,
I cannot rhyme his beastly name),

GAY GODS, AND

"Ah, well! Perhaps you might do worse.
I longed for grand-sons, but"—a sigh—
"The cost of living sure is high;
I'm tired of fish and long for liver!"
Her pa, Peneus, was a river.

And so it happened, Daphne did
Devote her days unto the Chase;
Whene'er she saw a man, she hid;
Nor would she show her pretty face
To any man except her father;
A modest little maiden? Rather!
So modest she—she would not flirt
Her dainty little hunting skirt!

Though best-laid plans of mice and men
May go astray; no mouse, no man,
Can hope to bring the wit in play
That e'en the dullest godling can.
For gods beat human folks all hollow—
Especially the god Apollo;
Apollo, who was far from stupid,
Had heard of Daphne from Dan Cupid,
And he resolved that he would see
How true young Cupid's tale might be.

He laid in wait and spied the maid,
Who tripped along the woodland path,
In haste and somewhat disarrayed,

MERRY MORTALS

Intent upon her evening bath,
Not dreaming that a soul was near,
Until upon her startled ear
There broke a single love-lorn sigh,
Which warned her that the god was
nigh.

Then like a startled fawn she fled,
The grass scarce bending 'neath her feet,
Her hair out-streaming from her head,
Her face as pale as any sheet.
And as she fled the god pursued,
(A most ungentle act, and rude!)
And gained, and gained, and gained so
fast,
She thought her breath must fail at
last!

"Help! Help!" she cried. "Peneus, aid
Your daughter—save, oh, save me now!
So weary and so sore afraid!"
And in a moment on her brow
Some tiny twigs began to grow,
Her feet took root—for, you must know,
Her father, by divine decree,
Transformed his daughter to a tree!

"Ah!" sighed Apollo, "what is this?
My tree! You can't escape me now!"

GAY GODS, AND

Upon her trunk he pressed a kiss—
Poor Daphne blushed in every bough;
“You have,” said he, “a lovely limb;”
(Say, honest, I’m ashamed of him!)
How sad to see a perfect lady
Become a character so shady!

The Moral is—be careful how
You dress when you go out to swim;
Poor Daphne might be hunting now,
Instead of wearing trunks for him!

MERRY MORTALS



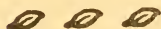
HERE ENDETH



THIS LITTLE BOOK



OF



PAGAN POEMS



2
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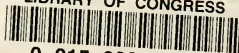


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